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1916

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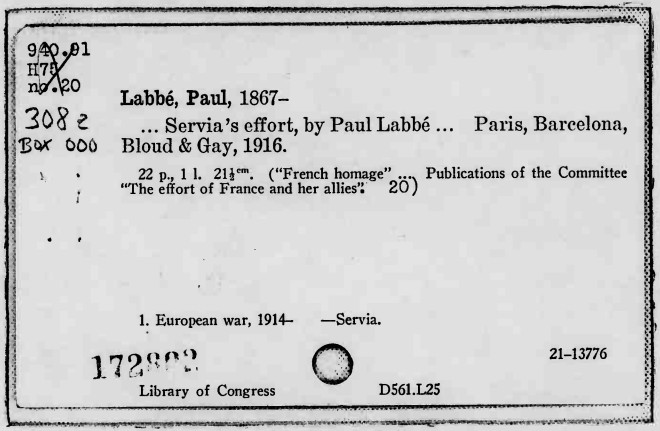

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"FRENCH HOMAGE"

# SERVIA'S EFFORT

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by

PAUL LABBÉ

Publication of the Committee
"THE EFFORT OF FRANCE
AND OF HER ALLIES"

*BLOUD & GAY, Publishers*
PARIS-BARCELONE

# SERVIA'S EFFORT

"FRENCH HOMAGE"

# SERVIA'S EFFORT

BY

**Paul LABBÉ**

*Secrétaire général de la Société de Géographie commerciale*
*Secrétaire général du Comité "L'Effort de la France et de ses Alliés"*



PUBLICATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE
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# SERVIA'S EFFORT

**The Bulwark — of — Christendom.**

In the days before the war, but little was known of Servia. A few close friends, who had lived with them in terms of intimacy and who appreciated their worth, had alone foreseen the great destinies in store for the heroic Serbs. They had studied their history; they had marked their age-long struggles against the Turks and the Austrians and had been duly impressed by their sturdy belief in eventual restoration, their deep faith in the greatness of their country.

The Turk had always been a plunderer; wherever he went, he never failed to hold up his neighbours to ransom. The Austro-Hungarian used methods of a somewhat different character; after alternate attempts at intimidation and bribery, he plotted to ruin Servia in the very midst of peace. Now Servia was well able to withstand armed aggression; with her deep gorges and narrow mountain passes, she may be likened to a gigantic stronghold. Economically, however, her position was one of lamentable inferiority. Her country one dense cluster of mighty hills, she was debarred from access to the sea; she had no natural outlets, for the surrounding population, although of Servian stock, were subjected to an alien yoke. Thus was she prevented from disposing of her trade products abroad, her activities cramped at every turn by the fact that Austria always had the power to close the frontiers of the Save and of the Danube, according to the real or fancied interests of her own policy. By way of the Iron Gates, on the other hand, transport was very costly, for Hungary, being mistress of the canal, imposed grievous duties upon the peoples along its banks. An understanding with Franz-Joseph's Government might indeed have facilitated Servian trade, but this would have involved the

acceptance of shameful terms in exchange for economic facilities, the yielding of old-established rights, the recognition of unfounded claims, thus disowning the past and endangering the future. Their very honor would the Serbs have been called upon to pledge.

Few indeed were the Europeans who understood the situation, or who extended to Servia the full measure of gratitude to which she was entitled. For centuries past her proud highlanders, hemmed in on every side by the dwellers in the plains, have fought to save Europe from invasion. Their mountain fastnesses have ever been the bulwark of Christendom against the Turks, and of late the obstacle shutting off the Germans from the coveted route to the East. All the noble qualities that none would deny them to day, bravery, tenacity, fealty to the past, self-sacrifice ,love of freedom and contempt of death, the Serbs owe to the long and bitter trials so bravely endured in the past, as much as to the geographical position of their country.

That country is one of suspassing beauty, endowed like the soul of its people with deep seductive charm. All who have lived in Servia, however short their stay, have fallen under the spell : diplomatists, scholars, travelers, not one but has yielded to her gentle witchery, whether on a visit to Belgrade,with its lordly citadel and tapering bell-towers standing on the very edge of the country — a beacon of hope and promise to the Serbs under Hungarian rule ; or on a tour through the villages, where the comely peasant-girls, whose clear steady eyes proclaim their honest natures, would come arrayed in all the bravery of trim black bodices, embroidered aprons and dainty chemisettes, to present their foreign guests with red peppercorns and luscious golden grapes. Undemonstrative by nature, the Serb does not make friends easily ; his feelings lie deep-hidden in his heart, but when his confidence has been won over, he gives himself wholly and for ever. He is faithful to friendship, as he has always been to his mother-country, to his dreams, to his hopes. As compared with the Austro-Hungarian, the Serb is the better man, the more progressive, socially and morally. He knows what he wants, he knows what duty requires of him and rarer still, he has known how to bide his time.



**—The Cult— of the Land**

Along the excellent roads from Chablats to Valievo, from Negotin to Tchoupria, from Nish to Stoudenitza, or through the fruitful Choumadia, the wealthy district of Smederevo, the passes of Pirot and Vrania, and all the lovely scenery so pleasing to the eye, which war and the barbarous hand of man have overwhelmed in ruin and desolation, the most striking feature is the sterling honesty of the land itself and of those who cultivate it. The soil of Servia is kindly and bountiful, responsive to the love and respect of the husbandman, whose toil it handsomely rewards. Again, every labourer looks upon himself as a gentleman, justly arguing that the trade he plies is the highest in the land and that true nobility is conferred upon him who honourably tills the soil of his native country.

On every hand are to be seen fields of maize and wheat, their gently-waving tops spreading their golden mantle far as the eye can reach, and affording welcome shade to beanstalks, pumpkins and marrows, or again a succession of plum-orchards, the fruit of which, exported to distant lands, brings wealth to the peasantry. Nevertheless large fortunes are few and far between, for this is a country of small holdings. By virtue of a humane law, every man owns his little plot of land, his house, from which no creditor can drive him forth ; nor are any beggars to be met with in any part of the country, save a few itinerant musicians.

Here and there, however, are to be seen estates of more considerable importance : they are the appanage of some one and the same family, to which they have belonged for generations ; the paternal inheritance, undivided, has remained common property, and has been added to by purchase ; thus have been built up the large *zadrougué*, so often described, and which are such a peculiar feature of the Servian villages. These family communities sometimes comprize as many as sixty people, and are ruled either by the oldest in years, or by the *gospodar*, elected by all the members of the association. It should be added that the number of these is not so large as it was formerly, private ownership having gradually, though at times all too suddenly, taken the place of the old arrangements.

A trait that distinguishes the Servian peasants from those of so many other countries is their respect for learning. Any boy who is clever at his books, however poor he may be, will always

find some rich patron to supply him with the means of completing his education, first at the elementary school, then at they secondary, finishing up with a University course at home or even abroad. Many of those who have filled the highest posts in the country have thus risen to power by the help of men who had appreciated their abilities, as well as by their own industry and intelligence.

Genial hospitality is widely practised ; you cannot but yield to the unaffected kindliness of the reception extended to you. Any foreigner is made a welcome guest, but none more so than the Frenchman ; to him the Serb is specially attracted, mindful of the fact that all the broad ideas of liberty came to him from France, and that his marvelous effort to remain free from the Turkish yoke was inspired by the essential principles of the French Revolution. The Serbs are well acquainted with our history, they read our books, enjoy our plays, and follow our parliamentary debates with keen interest. In the smallest towns, nay in the very villages, you will find self-taught women who speak French fluently. The movement for the diffusion of our language met with general support in Servia before the war. For some years past, young men who went up to be examined for their Bachelor's degree, showed a marked preference for French as a subject, rather that German, and on several occasions the Servian Government — our late friend M. Milanovitch, the Foreign minister, had made a special point of this — requested France to open a French secondary school in Belgrade. It behoves us, at this stage, to do honor to the two chief contributors to that movement, M. Descos, Minister plenipotentiary, and M. Gravier, French Lecturer at the University of Belgrade, who after doing such good work in Servia, died bravely at Carency.

**— The Cult — of the Past. The Vidovdan and Kossovo**

To the cult of the land is added the cult of the past. Dark as that past may be, the lesson it teaches the Serbs is not one of discouragement ; rather to them is the study of their national history a school of energy ; they are brought to realize that Servia, the bulwark of Christendom against the Turkish invader, was ever a great nation, that her claim to independence is of century-old standing, and that what she asks for to-day is but what was hers in the days of long ago ; in communion of spirit with their departed heroes, they dream of future requital. Even



before these years of constant warfare and baleful epidemics, every schoolboy was taught that Servia had been vanquished at Kossovo, but that the future is to the daring, and that of a surety all the lost territory shall be recovered some day.

June 28 is the Servian national fête-day, kept not only in free Servia, but in every country where Serbs are to be found. It is the *Vidovdan*, the day of presage, of undying hope, of certain retribution. Misfortunes purify the soul of a great people, as they do the soul of a great man ; strange and touching to relate, the day the Serbs have for centuries chosen to celebrate in preference to all others as a token of love for their mother-country, whether in Servia or in Croatia, in the Banat or in Macedonia, is the anniversary of their great defeat in 1389, with its attendant train of grief and mourning, of pain and torture, and worst of all to Yugo-slavonic eyes, the enforced acceptance of hateful slavery.

On the field of Kossovo, indeed, Servian courage never flinched, honor was preserved intact ; well might succeeding generations pay yearly homage to the heroes whom an unkind fate had driven to seek refuge in death rather than submit to the loss of their freedom. Bitter and crushing as that defeat assuredly was, it was powerless to stifle hope in the breasts of the Serbs. Their womenfolk, their old men knew that the rising generations must be impressed with the duty of avenging their elders ; the monks in their convents worked faithfully at this national task : as a result of their strenuous teaching, under the influence also of the learned scholars of the Doubrovnik (Ragusa), the national feeling was kept alive. Among the people, it was bound up with their faithful attachment to the Orthodox religion. Thus have Servian hearts accepted as undying articles of faith: fealty to the past, respect for their prolific race, and a steadfast belief in ultimate retribution, slow to come perhaps, but no less certain on that account, when every man is ever planning for it in silence, and all are determined to achieve it at any price, when the times are ripe.

The most poetically inclined perhaps of all the Slavonic peoples, the Serbs bear in mind that they have ever marched to the battlefield to the sound of war-songs chanted by their bards. Their old men would recite to the children the heroic epics and popular legends of Servia. Noble verse is a powerful incentive to noble deeds. On the walls of the white cottages of the peasantry was to be seen but yesterday the *guzla* of the old troubadours, while everybody knew by heart : the lines of the poet Ivanovitch, in which the graves of their forebears are

made to adress the men of the present generation pointing out their duty in eloquent though simple style.

*" Where I have laid down my task, thou shalt take it up,*
*What I have left undone, thou shalt accomplish,*
*The goal I have been unable to reach, thou shalt attain,*
*What I have begun, thou shalt carry out to the end,*
*What we owe still, thou shalt e'en repay. "*

In these lines are to be found all the great principles, all the noble thoughts that actuate the Serbs : among them the word duty need never be uttered ; it is graven indelibly in the hearts of their very children.

**The Annexion - of Bosnia -**

Down to 1908, the Serbs toiled in silence : it was in the month of October of that year that they realised that the times were pregnant and that great trials were in store for stout hearts. By brute force Austria had annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Viennese press noisily proclaimed the fact, as though it had been a victory won at the point of the sword ; more recently we have been presented by that press with many another impudent fabrication! In the streets of Belgrade, there was a vast demonstration held almost in silence, and of highly impressive simplicity ; throughout the country, in every town I visited, from Kragouievatz to Belgrade, I observed the same perfect composure, a like determination to do or die at the country's call.

All the tales published on that occasion by the newspapers of Vienna and Buda-Pesth are a mere tissue of lies. There were no windows broken at the Austrian Legation, no hostile clamors, but a display of marvelous dignity and powerful restraint. Beyond the Save, on the contrary, from Semlin to Zagrel (Agram), nothing was to be seen but regiments on a war-footing, rivers and bridges under military watch and ward. On the one hand, open provocation, on the other, unflinching expectancy. The annexion of Bosnia and Herzegovina was to the Serbs, what the Agadir incident was to France. It enlightened their statesmen as to the very present danger threatening their marches and pointed to the impending fulfilment of the long cherished dreams of the Servian population. The treaty of Berlin was torn



to shreds by Austria. In vain did the Serbs appeal to Europe ; before the threat of a general war, Russia gave way through sheer love of peace. M. Milanovitch, in heeding the judicious advice tendered to him on that occasion showed great wisdom and foresight, but it was brought home to every Serb that he must be in readiness for the coming conflict. Further aggression was sure to follow, and Servia had felt the hearts of Russia, France and England, beating in unison with her own.

**The Balkan War-Austria's veto - Opinion after the war**

A country in which duty plays such a prominent part could not but prove victorious in the Balkan War. To the great astonishment of the diplomatists of almost every nation, whom a certain number of consuls had striven in vain to enlighten, Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks and Montenegrins carried to a triumphant issue the coalition they had formed against the Turks, who were soon utterly discomfited. The Balkanic Union won the day. The Serbs vied with the Bulgarians in valor and enthusiasm, indeed they gave more than was asked of them. They had promised 150.000 men ; they sent 300.000. On more than one occasion, they took upon themselves what was rather the appointed task of the Greeks. It was thanks to the field-guns supplied by King Peter that Adrianople fell into the hands of the Bulgarians, the very guns, by the way, that Ferdinand of Bulgaria refused to give back a few months later.

It will be remembered how Austria, who hated Servia with a malignancy born of her own evil intents and of the fear in which she stood of the hardy mountain people, prevented the latter by her *veto* from acquiring a port on the Adriatic, the lack of which was sapping her economic life ; also how Servia on finding her share so unwarrantably restricted, applied to Bulgaria for well-deserved compensation. To this request Sofia turned a deaf ear ; her government showed a spirit of aggressive insolence, followed by a treacherous onslaught made on Servia by her recent Allies. At the instigation of Austria, Ferdinand stirred up the Bulgarian military party, who had also been worked upon by secret German agents. From that day, disloyalty to Russia marked the policy of Bulgaria, though the fact was not realised at the time in Petrograd.

Bulgaria was beaten, as she deserved to be ; she would have

been utterly crushed if General Putnik and the Servian government had not yielded to a generous impulse, in the hope moreover of future reconciliation. Servia thus acquired a wider tract of territory than she had expected, though as yet nothing was settled permanently. As late as 1913, the Servian statesmen with whom I conversed in Belgrade, all appeared desirous of coming to a speedy understanding with Bulgaria ; it was only necessary, they said, to allow the lapse of time to appease the rancor and bring about a healthier vision of past events. For them the natural foe was in the West, and the higher interests of their country demanded the renewal of the Balkanic Union, even at the cost of certain sacrifices, for the joint benefit of the signatory nations.

About this time I visited some of the districts liberated from the Turkish yoke : Kumanova, Skoplia, Pritchina. Everywhere I found the same need and longing for peace ; the object was to make life easier and more pleasant for the delivered Serbs, to fertilize the conquered territory, while respecting the lawful rights of the Turks that had become Servian subjects.

Great was the effect produced by the victory of Servia in all the districts under Austrian rule. In the eyes of all Serbs whether free or still under the alien yoke, Kumanova had been the counterpart of Kossovo. A vast pilgrimage was planned in Belgrade wherein all faithful freinds of Servia were to take part, to visit the battlefields erstwhile the scene of sorrowful defeat.

In spite of war and disease, the Servian land had not been left uncultivated ; the brave women had toiled as earnestly as the men would have done had they been there. Both in town and country however, as soon as the name of Austria was mentioned, the feeling arose that to her nothing should be, nothing could be forgiven. The dream had been too sweet, too near coming true, the resulting disappointment too bitter. « If they attack us, I was assured, our guns will go off of themselves ». Austria was not feared : Franz-Joseph, it was reasoned, having never known anything but defeat. A pesant woman who had been sorely tried during the Balkan War, declared herself ready for fresh sacrifices, in language of admirable simplicity, showing how ready the people were to do their duty, for all their wish to live in peace : « What matter the leaves and twigs that fall, she said, provided the tree remains standing. »

At the end of October 1913, I had a memorable conversation with the King of Servia. He had done me the honor, on several previous occasions, of receiving me at the Konak, the now ruined palace that used to look down upon the city. Peter I had aged a good deal : The man I had before me was



no longer the gallant officer who used to wear the pearl-grey uniform with such easy distinction ; he leaned on a stick and walked with somewhat bent body, his stride considerably shortened. As soon as he spoke, however, you recognized the man who served France well. Of all the kings in the world, none is more worthy than he of the broad red ribbon of the Legion of Honor, won by him on the battlefield in 1870, when fighting for France against the Germans.

« You have seen our liberated territory, he said to me. The present is a time for work and serious thought ; but you have witnessed the power of the Serbs, you are in a position to realize what brave soldiers I shall be able to place at the disposal of France, next time she is at war with Germany ».

Nine months later, the whole of France rose as one man, intent upon saving Servia.

## — 1914 — The Year of Victory

Austria, who since the treaty of Bucharest had never ceased stirring up trouble in Albania against the Serbs, turned to account the Sarajevo murders, about which the full truth has certainly not yet come to light. Count Berchtold made the Servian government responsible and declared publicly that he would admit of no discussion on the subject. We all know the sequel, the shameful pretensions put forward; the wise compliance of Servia ; the impudent and premeditated quarrel forced upon her, after the acceptance of the most humiliating terms ; the high-handed intervention of Germany ; the early Servian victories, Belgrade bombarded for four months before the Austrians were able to enter the city.

The whole world had averred that M. Pachitch's government had gone to the utmost limit of possible concessions. The Serbs had received the declaration of war with calm fortitude, bowing to the inevitable. The fulfilment of her destinies was at hand. One and all answered the country's summons. There were no noisy demonstrations, no indulgence in braggart talk. All knew that the task would prove a heavy one, that the Montenegrins alone would join in, that the Bulgarians were hostile, and that although M. Venizelos could be depended upon, King Constantine was not to be trusted. Meantime that which the Servian statesmen and writers had long foreseen took place : the conflagration became general. Germany wanted war, and it results clearly from the diplomatic documents and books made

public, that at the last minute she would not allow Austria to draw back.

Then for the first time did enthusiastic demonstrations take place in Belgrade. Cheers were raised before their respective legations in honor of France, Russia and England, when the most generous-hearted nations arose to defend justice and truth against the barbarians.

Defeated on the Tser, the Ladar, and at Chabatz, the Austrian troops returned to the charge in greater numbers and with increasing determination ; the Serbs were compelled to retreat. Al ready the hostile press had begun to cry victory, for was not Servia on the verge of destruction! Those alone who knew her well kept up their hope and steady trust ; they perceived that the temporary withdrawal was the putting into practice of a regular plan decided upon years before. The Servian army was merely seeking a favorable position from which to deliver a crushing blow.

Old King Peter, in bad health at the time, had been constrained to appoint his son to the Regency; before the danger that threatened, he left the watering-place where he had been staying and repaired to the front. Flag in hand, he addressed his men :

: Soldiers, your old King has come to die with you ; if there be any that are afraid, let them turn back. »

Not a man deserted his post; it was the Austrians that were affrighted, and they turned their backs quickly enoug, has was ever their way. The Serbs fought a merciless battle ; the enemy were utterly routed, and in their headlong flight they left everything behind them : their wounded, their ammunition, their guns, rifles and colors. General Putnik's army collected a magnificent booty.

On December 15 th, while the Serbs were completing the task of hurling the Austrians into the Save, amid the roar of guns saluting the great victory. King Peter returned to Belgrade, his white city, now red with streams of blood ; first of all he was led to the Cathedral, the doors of which had to be burst open before he was able to render thanks to God ; then he proceeded to the Konak ; on the gateway of the royal palace were written up these simple words : « Apply for the key to the Austrian captain. » The captain was far away, among the slain no doubt.

The door was stove in, a soldier climbed up to a window, tore down the enemy's colors, still flying there, and the old King entered his abode, treating Franz-Joseph's flag underfoot.

The Servian army had taken 64.000 prisoners, most of whom



are at present in Italy, whither they were sent before the retreat ; the rest had died of wounds or disease.

In the invaded districts, alas, many were the towns that had suffered unutterable woe ; the houses had been burned down, the churches defiled ; Chabatz, that little Servian Paris, as people were fain to call it, was in ruins ; beautiful Loznitsa, with its graceful church, was no more ; Kovilatcha, the green watering-place on the banks of the Drina, was a heap of ashes ; Valievo, with its prettily laid-out environs, had likewise suffered grievously at the hands of the invader, and the same may be said of those lovely villages, Chtitar, Novo, Selo, and so many others, perhaps the most prosperous in all Servia.

**The Dishonor - of Austria - and Hungary**

All this the savage hordes had been guilty of, and more ; not content with burning and plundering, they had vented their spite upon the people and committed unspeakable crimes ; never perhaps have more dastardly outrages been witnessed on the face of the earth. Professor Reiss, of Lausanne, has given a long list of these abominations, yet he cannot have seen all that took place. No pity was shown to anyone ; the Austrians inflicted the most fearful tortures upon the civilian population ; they put them to death — the ugly deeds are set forth in Professor Reiss's booklet, comprising both circumstantiated documents and photographs — with bullets and by bayoneting, hanging, burning or burying alive ; eyes were gouged out, noses, ears and breasts hacked off, not to mention other outrages, more shameful yet. Professor Reiss, in conducting his enquiry, was not satisfied with the evidence of eye-witnesses, he questioned the Austrian prisoners, he opened graves, examined the slain and the wounded. The butchers had taken no heed of the sex or the age of their victims ; in many cases women, children and old people were mutilated before they were put to death, and the Lausanne professor quotes an instance when the Austrians cast a living baby to the swine.

It should be added that the massacres were prepared and planned systematically. A document has come to light containing instructions for the treatment of the Servian population. This document emanates from the K. U. K. G. Korps Kommando (Imperial and Royal General Staff) and sets forth that

with regard to the Serbs « all feelings of humanity or kindness are misplaced and even harmful ». They are to be treated « with the greatest harshness, the utmost severity ». No bells are to be rung and mass is to be celebrated in the open, under the supervision of armed soldiers, prepared to shoot at any moment « Every inhabitant found beyond the limits of the locality is to be looked upon as belonging to a band who have concealed their weapons ; such people must be shot if there is any doubt as to their character. »

Copies of this infamous document, have been carefully preserved, to the standing disgrace of Austria and Hungary. They will soon be committed to the judgment of History.

## —— 1915 —— The Year of —the Typhus,— —Bulgarians— —and Exile—

Meanwhile Servia was delivered for the time being ; hope revived in every quarter, but alas, typhus broke out in the country, attended by many epidemics : cholera, diphteria, etc. ; the ravages caused by disease were even more terrible than those resulting from the war, as had already been the case when cholera followed in the wake of the Balkan campaign. Half the doctors were carried off ; the whole country was devastated ; as many as 70 or even 80 % of the infected died. Then it was that a wonderful deed of charity was accomplished by all the allied nations, by neutrals, nay by the whole world. Heedless of every danger, sanitary formations were sent to Servia, our own acquitting itself nobly of its mission. It is impossible to convey an adequate impression of the appaling scenes witnessed throughout the country ; people were seen to fall down and die on the streets. In the towns, not a house but flew the black flag ; it is said that at Uskub, the priests of the several religions would come to the cemetery in the morning and read the burial service over all the dead that were brought in ; behind them, in front, on either side, were long lines of coffins. Moving incidents were not infrequent, as I was told by an eye-witness belonging to the French Legation : a woman, issuing from her home to tend a dying sufferer ; a priest, tarrying at the peril of his life to give his blessing to the dead ; corpses lying in a heap, those of a whole family. In Nish, one day, when the epidemic was at its height, the friend



who told me all this, saw a soldier on horseback approach a house opposite his own. Two women in deep mourning came out : they were the mother and the wife of an officer who had fallen in battle, and the soldier had brought to them from afar the horse he used to ride. Melting into tears, the two women piously kissed the charger, whereupon the soldier galloped off without looking back, on his way to further battles.

All this time, during days and nights of mourning and constant dread, doctors, orderlies and nurses fought unremittingly against the plague ; many fell victims to their devotion, but at last the typhus was in its turn overcome ; science conquered disease and the death-rate began to decline. Enfeebled and decimated, the Serbs might well believe that they had reached the end of their calvary, but alas the worst was yet to come.

The Germans were intent upon revenge ; also they meant to cross the Balkans and get to Constantinople. They joined forces with the Austrians and bribed the caitiff monarch who reigns at Sofia. The Bulgarians have not, like the Serbs, the honor of being ruled by a king of their own stock, in whose veins flows the blood of the heroes who founded their national independence. Ferdinand is but a second-hand king, at the beck and call of William II. The statesmen he has around him are the worthy servants of such a master; for them, as M. Kenopol declared publicly in the Rumanian Parliament last December, without calling forth the slightest protest, treason is a dogma and falsehood a mode of government. Members of Parliament, political writers, journalists, all followed the government's lead ; the whole Bulgarian people, who owe everything to Russia, sided with our enemies, and a writer was found in Sofia to acclaim the alliance of sister-nations, as he was pleased to call the unnatural union of Bulgarians, Turks and Hungarians!

It must be confessed, moreover, that we had shown an almost inexcusable tolerance towards Sofia. Certain diplomatists of the Entente, certain friends of Bulgaria, urged the Serbs to make a few sacrifices ; they even went so far as to offer Ferdinand, in exchange for mere friendly neutrality, tracts of territory owned by the Serbs. None but a caitiff king would proceed to betray the vital interests of his people, but Ferdinand heeds only his own resentment and hate. His memory being so good, does he remember the day when he made a solemn entry into his capital, after assuming the title of Czar. I was present on that occasion : had it not been for the two footmen who held his horse on either side, he would have had a sorry fall ; the road he is now following is yet more slippery than the street-pavement in Sofia : the first time he stumbles in the muddy gore, there will be no footman

at hand to save him from the consequences. The Bulgarians are our enemies, deny it who will, nor can any distinction be drawn between them and their ruler, but in the fateful hour of atonement, they will judge the villain whom they will have to thank for their undoing and they will not spare him.

Now the Serbs had foreseen what their enemies were about to do ; in fact they were half minded to forestall them by moving into their country, but Petrograd appears to have opposed this plan ; the Russian capital did not, or would not believe in the danger. Shortly after, the Serbs were themselves mercilessly attacked, having to face at one and the same time the Bulgarians, the Austro-Hungarians and the Germans. The enemy appeared in force on the Drina, on the Save, on the Danube, as well as at all the mountain passes. The country was invaded at three distinct points. A fresh period of crime, of horror, of devastation forthwith began. Yet the Serbs still clung to hope. Help might be forthcoming at the eleventh hour ; the French were reported to be on the move. *Petlitchi, Petlitchi,* was the general cry : the cocks are coming up from Salonika. It was still thought, indeed, that when the crow of the Gallic cock was heard, all would be saved. Alas, our small force was too weak and too far away.

And yet Servia had signed a treaty in Bucharest, by the terms of which she might well think herself entitled to rely upon the assistance of two neighbouring states, if attacked by the Bulgarians. In both cases she was cruelly disappointed, though her best friends knew, indeed, what to expect. Greece, who would never have had Salonika, but for her assistance, cynically broke her plighted word. Rumania persisted in an attitude of cautious expectancy. But she knew already on which side she would come in. Her place was with us, nor did her heart disappoint ours. As a nation, she was proud of the Latin blood inherited from Trajan's legions. She knew that France and Italy loved her, that they relied upon her. Hemmed in though she was, on every side, and in a position of serious danger, she could not but lend an ear to the call of the Rumanians who were being butchered in Bukovina and in Transylvania and who had been hourly praying to see the troops from Bucharest sweep down as conquerors through the Carpathian passes, to make a reality of that noblest of dreams, greater Rumania.



**— The — heroic Retreat**

The siege of Servia had begun ; it was necessary for her sons to take up the fight once more, enfeebled by disease, inadequately provided with ammunition, cut off from all possible communication with the Allies, overwhelmed by countless numbers. The world to which the Serbs had so often been a subject for marvel, wondered whether war in the Balkans was at last to come to an end. Certain it was, the brave hillmen would never surrender, were they going to fight till they were all killed?

They were considered fearless enough even for that. Then it was that a scene was witnessed, the like of which has never been known, a scene more sublime than the grandest epic : an army destitute of everything, in sullen retreat before the invader, leaving in the enemy's hands their women, children, and old men, nay their very country, because of thier confident belief in the future and in ultimate victory.

A start was made on the arduous journey, so severe that it is a marvel how it came to be accomplished. Three different routes were taken across the Albanian mountains, all three rugged and difficult. The first, followed by the Prince Regent, led through Loumkoula to Scutari ; the second taken by King Peter, was by way of Dibra, Elbassa and Durazzo ; the third, of which the ministers availed themselves with their suite, passed through Diakova, Ipek, Podgoritza.

The Prince Regent was the first to reach the shores of the Adriatic, having taken but two and a half days to cover the distance. The first to lead, he was the last to sail to Corfu. A true son of the Karageorges, his was ever the post of danger, where death could be looked full in the face. To a name glorious already he added fresh lustre. Faithful to his breed and to his allies, he three times refused the peace offered to him : when he was fighting the plague, before the great attack, and at the very moment when the retreat began. Never once did he despair.

He is a youth endowed by misfortune with all the wisdom of an old man. Yet, as we all were able to see when he came to Paris, unaffected and undismayed, he still wears that alluring smile of youth, whereby Paris was captivated.

As to old King Peter, he conquered death itself. His painful journey over the mountains, was made on foot, atmost unattended, with enemies all around, not one of whom dared to raise an impious hand against the aged Sovereign who commanded universal respect and went by, a living emblem of Servia.

Nor did the leaders alone show their greatness in the midst of suffering. The whole army experienced hunger ; it had to make its way through the snow, to climb steep mountain passes. A number of men would reach a valley, where a path would be found, along which they were obliged to proceed one by one. The weakest lay down to die. At times whole files would totter and fall down like a house of cards. The smallest morsel of bread could only be bought at the price of gold. Thus did the troops stumble along, followed by their wounded, by women, children and old men, pale and emaciated ghosts, who nevertheless marched on to victory! How were all these heroes able to win through? What gave them wings in their long flight, save and except the throught of duty? Behind them, they seemed to hear the great voices of their dead, the men of Kossovo, of Kumanova, of the Tser, of Roudni , of Belgrade, urging them on, keeping up their courage and strengthening their will, by repeating as a command to all true sons of Servia, the words of the poet :

*« Where I have laid down my task, thou shalt take it up.*
*The goal I have been unable to reach, thou shalt attain,*
*What I have begun, thou shalt carry out to the end. »*

Who can doubt to-day but what the sons of Servia will accomplish what their fathers have left undone.

Fortunately for the Servian soldiers, France was on the alert, France was ready ; she it was that awaited them and cared for them, bringing together their broken regiments in Corfu and Bizerta, giving shelter to the women and old men, and homes to the children.

The latter were worthy of such fathers. It will be remembered that on leaving Durazzo, a boatload of Servian children were stopped by the Austrians and taken to Cattaro, though they were under the protection of the Red Cross. They were asked to land ; food and presents were offered to them ; they held a consultation and unanimously decided to refuse the presents of the enemy ; yet the oldest of them was only fourteen. Those youngsters, who will be the mainstay of Greater Servia to-morrow, had imbibed courage with their mothers' milk. Well might France extend her fostering arms to such as these. No change has been wrought in our schools, except that French children have acquired a few more playmates.

They have found in our country soft women's hands to warm them when they are cold, to wipe away their tears when they



are sad ; during their exile among us, their brothers-in-arms, they will have been taught useful lessons, to be applied later on, when they cultivate their lands and work their looms ; they will be brought to realise that France and Servia are bound together for all time ; they will get to know the women of France, so grievously misjudged abroad, who have shown, however, such true nobility, such admirable qualities during the present war, from the old dame with her tireless knitting, and the nurse affronting death at the bed-side of the wounded, to the humble peasant-woman who, in the absence of her husband, digs deep the furrow from which will spring the next crops.

An affecting custom has always existed in Servian lands. When two men have become fast friends, they take a solemn oath of everlasting brotherhood, sworn before a priest and on the Gospel; sometimes this oath is ratified by the mutual exchange of a drop of blood ; they become brothers-elect ; thenceforth they will share their every joy and sorrow, nor can either of them marry the other's sister. For the last two years, our two countries have exchanged the embrace that binds them for ever together with the best of their blood Never was witnessed a finer or a more heart-felt *pobratimstvo*! Truly a strong and enduring sentiment ; nor will there be seen, in the future, allies more faithful to each other than France and Servia, each proud of the task accomplished, and having by that time recovered their natural frontiers and delivred their oppressed brothers. Each of them had her Alsace-Lorraine to take back, and in either case the foe was the German!

**The ineradicable Hope**

What a mournful ending to the year 1915! In by-gone days, on the banks of the Danube, the close of the year was ever a season of joy : the Servian Christmas falling thirteen days later than ours, was kept in such graceful style! In 1915, no young men were left in the country, to bring in the traditional log from the neighboring woods, the honored *Badniak*, which every father of a family awaited on his door-step, a lighted candle in his hand, while his wife, wielding a broad farmer's winnowing-fan, scattered grain arornd her as a sign that happiness and wealth were being brought into the house together with the log.

Old men there must have been, no doubt, to grope their way to the fields in the dark, there to fell the usual tree ; the log was set on fire, according to custom, by means of an ember kept over from past festivals ; friends came to the house ; there was no rich feast awaiting them, for all were desperately poor ; but each guest stirred the fire in turn, the flying sparks being, as they say, so many promises, hopes and joys, destined to be fulfilled ; and in the flames they seemed to glimpse the end of their woes, their country freed from the oppressor, the houses rebuilt, the land made more fruitful by the fertilizing agency of the generous blood it has imbibed ; their thoughts must have been of the coming Christmas, a Christmas of beauty, when the women and old men will seat the little ones on their laps, and tell them of the great Servian epic, of their fathers slain in battle because they wished their sons to be free men, their country restored, and because in Servia, honor is dearer than life itself.

# INDEX

The Bulwark of Christendom .. .. .. .. .. .. 5
The Cult of the Land .. .. .. .. .. .. .. 7
The Cult of the Past. The Vidovdan-Kossovo .. .. 8
The Annexion of Bosnia .. .. .. .. .. .. .. 10
The Balkan War, Austria's veto. Opinion after the war.. 11
1914: The Year of Victory .. .. .. .. .. .. 13
The Dishonor of Austria and Hungary .. .. .. .. 15
1915 : The Year of the Typhus, the Bulgarians and Exile .. .. .. .. .. .. .. .. .. .. 16
The heroic Retreat .. .. .. .. .. .. .. .. 19
The ineradicable Hope .. .. .. .. .. .. .. 21

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